

Title: Rhetoric of Space and Place in Western PA: Generating Scholarship with Place
Instructor: Dr. Caitlin Bruce

Introduction/Summary:

This course introduces students to the work of rhetorical inquiry about and with spaces and places, with an attention to modes of production that are public facing and based in community partnerships. Through exploring scholarly material on humanist spatial inquiry in conjunction with site visits, collaborative documentation, and experimental writing (descriptions, blog posts, digital gallery exhibitions) students will be invited to explore the manifold ways they can work as scholars in and of space. Some guiding questions for the course include:

- How are space and place mobilized as tropes in rhetoric and in cultural geography?
- How do we read spaces and places as rhetorical enactments that shape individual and collective identity? We will address this question through a set of case studies involving monumental and highly charged spaces (for example, the Washington Mall), and less iconic realms (for instance, the Maxo Vanka murals), as well as local places that have significance for various publics. These trips will take place primarily outside of class time.
- How do we write with and about space and place?
- How do we approach the ethics and pragmatics of collaborative writing about place?

The first two thirds of the course are preparatory, and will involve exploring core conceptual frames, methodological practices, and a series of case studies about place, along with some site visits and guest visits. The last week of every section turns the classroom into a research lab about place-based stories where students will offer preliminary designs and writing samples around public-facing place-based research projects. I have approached a few organizations/collectives with whom I have ongoing collaborative relationships about their interest in working with Pitt students for such public archive building. Such organizations include City of Asylum, Rivers of Steel, the Millvale Society to Preserve the Murals of Maxo Vanka, Artist Image Resource, #notwhitecollective, Sibyl's Shrine, Urban Kind Institute. As a class, we will decide if we would like to pursue a project focused on a single organization, with different teams of students approaching different facets of the organization, or a theme that connects a network of organizations in the region. Given the constraints of time and the semester this work is intended to be preliminary and experimental but will provide students with experiences and points of contact to develop those relationships into the future. Instead of a seminar paper, the outcomes will include proposals for a future project like a website outline, podcast pitch/outline, grant proposal, tour proposal, and blog post as modes of research communication.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

- Students will achieve fluency in key concepts about space, place, memory, and identity in communication studies, human geography, and adjacent fields
- Students will learn to analyze sites through descriptive and analytic writing attentive to the composition of spaces, how it is engaged by users, and how to contextualize such descriptive writing with conceptual and contextual elements
- Students will be introduced to qualitative methods like oral history and interview and archival analysis in telling public-facing stories of place

- Students will experiment with different genres of writing including the academic essay, the public facing blog post, or the podcast
- Students will meet and engage with community practitioners involved in curating, maintaining and creating institutions of public culture. We will have ongoing conversations about the pragmatics and ethnics of community engagements and community partnerships in conducting public scholarship.

Grade breakdown:

- Participation 30%

Includes attendance during class time and trips

Writing Exercises:

- Weekly discussion posts- Post a one paragraph reflection, question, or provocation about the readings each week 10%
- Listening to Place – 500- 1000 words—assignment in schedule below 15%
- Spatial Attunement and Looking for Ghosts- 1000 words, assignment in schedule below 15%
- Activating Archival Stories – 500-700 words, assignment in schedule below, 15%
- Final project 15%

In addition to the three major writing exercises which focus on *listening*, *experiencing*, and *archiving/storytelling/enacting*, students will be responsible for developing a proposal for a larger project that they will pursue using course materials and experiences as a foundation. The form that such projects can take are open ended. They might be an interactive website with maps and archival fragments, like Njaime Njie’s *Homecoming: Hill District USA*. They could be a proposal for a podcast series about a series of questions or places in Pittsburgh, like Dr. Anderson’s collaborative *Concrete City* or *To Heaven and Back* projects. They might be a proposal for a tour that exercises the ghosts of capitalist violence and settlerism in Pittsburgh. They could be a pitch for a set of blog posts about a concrete set of issues around space and place. Regardless of the form the project takes each project proposal should include:

- Summary—250-500 words
- Ideal venue/specific audience- 100-200 words
- Outline/Schedule of activities- 150-200 words
- Plan for building partnerships/trust if relevant to project- 200 words
- List of primary materials that will support the project – 200 – 300 words
- List of secondary sources informing the project—200-500 words
- List of materials, skills, collaborators needed to actualize the project- 300 words
- Potential sources of funding—grants, crowdsourcing, fellowships—200 words

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

Syllabus Outline:

Unit 1: Writing with place

Who are we writing for and with? What communities/publics/audiences/conversations do we seek to join? To write for and with also requires learning about and learning to listen. In this three-week sequence we will discuss some of the major goals and questions for the course, collaboratively select a set of sites and archives to explore collectively, begin to experiment with forms of writing and listening with place, and do some introductory methods work on oral history.

Week 1 Attuning to Place:

- Zencey, Eric. "The rootless professors." *Rooted in the land: Essays on community and place* (1996): 15-19.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. "Language and the making of place: A narrative-descriptive approach." *Annals of the Association of American geographers* 81, no. 4 (1991): 684-696.
- Conquergood, Lorne Dwight. *Life in Big Red: Struggles and accommodations in a Chicago polyethnic tenement*. Vol. 91, no. 2. Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1991.
- bell hooks, "home place," in *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press. Chicago, 1990.
- Ratcliffe, Krista. "Rhetorical Listening: A Trope for Interpretive Invention and a" Code of Cross-Cultural Conduct"." *College composition and communication* 51, no. 2 (1999): 195-224.

Week 2 Qualitative Methods: Oral History and Interviews: "The archive is the people"

- *Oral History and Public Memories*, Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes eds. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008. Chapters: Introduction, Chapter 3, Chapter 5, Chapter 8, Chapter 9, Chapter 12, Chapter 14 (available through pitt library)
- Nepia Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition An Indigenous Perspective*, Oxford University Press 2019, Chapter 1.
- Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "Repetition Is Sacred: School of Our Lorde, Mobile Homecoming, and Legacy in Flight (Poetic Nonfiction)," *Feminist Studies* 40.1, p. 212

Week 3: Qualitative Methods: Embodied Research (Ethnography, Rhetoric In Situ)

- Michael Middleton, Aaron Hess, Danielle Endres, and Samantha Senda-Cook, *Participatory Critical Rhetoric : Theoretical and Methodological Foundations for Studying Rhetoric In Situ*, Lexington Books, 2015 (available through pitt library) – full book
- Sarah E. Truman, *Feminist Speculations and the Practice of Research-Creation Writing Pedagogies and Intertextual Affects*, New York: Routledge, 2022. [selection]

Week 3 Podcasting as Place Composition:

- *Potential visit from Dr. Erin Anderson or Dr. Casey Boyle*
- Sterne et al., “The Politics of Podcasting,” <https://thirteen.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-087-the-politics-of-podcasting/>
- Example 1: <https://citiesandmemory.com/> learned from Dr. Casey Boyle’s Writing with Sound course-- <https://caseyboyle.net/portfolio/writing-with-sound-rhe-330c/>
- Example 2: Concrete City –when released or “A Tale of Two Towns, Ghost Town(ing) Part 8,” January 13 or 2021, <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/423908746/the-modern-west>, “Maps,” A Sense of Place, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/oralhistory/podcasts.htm> or The Steps we Take: Troy Hill, <https://bikepgh.org/sites/steps-we-take/events/troy-hill/> <https://troyhillsteps.com/>

Week 4: Mapping as Writing with and About Place

- *Visit with Dr. Jason Beery, Director of Applied Research at UrbanKind Institute*
- Mack, Ashley Noel, and Tiara R. Na’Puti. ““Our bodies are not Terra Nullius”: Building a decolonial feminist resistance to gendered violence.” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 42, no. 3 (2019): 347-370.
- Lynch, Kevin. *The image of the city*. Vol. 11. MIT Press, 1960.
- Nathaniel A. Rivers, “Geocomposition in Public Rhetoric and Writing Pedagogy,” CCC 67:4 / june 2016
- Robert Brooke and Jason McIntosh, “deep maps: teaching rhetorical engagement,” *The Locations of Composition* (2007): 131.
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, ch. 7 “global counterinsurgency,” Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011.

Optional: E. Cram, “Feeling Cartography,” *Women’s Studies in Communication*, *Women’s Studies in Communication* 39 no. 2 (2016): 141-146.

Unit 1 Concluding: Writing Exercise: listening to place—borrowed from Dr. Lou Maraj’s “Writing for Social Change” course

- Visit a place in Pittsburgh (or wherever you are now). Record 5-10 minutes of audio from that place.
- Write about the audio you have recorded. What forms of talk do you hear? What kinds of sonic environments do you detect? What ways of defining place or community emerge? 200-500 words.
- Reflect on your writing. How are you situating yourself as a member or observer of place? What kinds of descriptors are you using for the place and its residents—and how do they relate to descriptors you would use for yourself (vernacular or academic)? Are you connecting this site to your own experiences and knowledge? What kinds of questions do you have or forms of knowledge do you wish you had to contextualize what you are writing about? Do you believe you are writing about or writing with place? Do you think this writing exhibits rhetorical listening, rooted or rootlessness, a sense of home place? 500 words
- Write about one place that you have dwelled in for a while. Imagine you are drafting a proposal for an episode of your favorite podcast, perhaps in the style of “this

American Life” or “99% invisible.” What are the major questions the episode will address? What kinds of context must be provided for the listener? What participants and collaborators will be invited to create a dynamic and participatory sense of place?
500 words

Unit 2: Place as object and as collaborator

How has place been rendered an object for scientific/philosophical analysis and capital/governmental management and control? How have protesters drawn on place as a rhetorical resource for resistance? How do thinkers in the humanities understand space as an actant/participant/agent with which humans are entangled? This section focuses on the way that space and place are rhetorically produced, requiring labor for their maintenance as well as contestation. We’ll consider the Carrie Furnaces as a case study for thinking about the production, decline, and renewal of industrial and postindustrial spaces and the kinds of narratives about labor and value that are engaged in such spaces.

- *Field trip to Carrie Furnaces early on in unit – during first or second week*

Week 5: The Social Production and Scholarly Construction of Space

- Michel DeCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011 (3rd Edition). [Selection]
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. [chapter 1. Pp 1-67]
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford university press, 2005.
- Vitale, Patrick. “Decline is Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 41 (1).

Week 6: Place and Space as Political Resource

- *Potential visit with Dr. Constance Gordon, San Francisco State University*
- McCann, Eugene J. "Race, protest, and public space: contextualizing Lefebvre in the US city." *Antipode* 31, no. 2 (1999): 163-184.
- Shome, Raka. "Space matters: The power and practice of space." *Communication Theory* 13, no. 1 (2003): 39-56.
- Endres, Danielle, and Samantha Senda-Cook. "Location matters: The rhetoric of place in protest." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (2011): 257-282.
- Darrel Wanzer-Serrano, “Trashing the System: Social Movement, Intersectional Rhetoric, and Collective Agency in the Young Lords Organization's Garbage Offensive,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92, no. 2 (2006): 174-201.

Week 7: The Limits of the Human in Human Geography

- Thomas Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013, Chapter 1: Chora
- Massey, Doreen. *Space, place, and gender*. U of Minnesota Press, 1994. “Introduction”

- Joan Faber McAlister, “Ten Propositions for Communication Scholars Studying Space and Place” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 39, no. 2 (2016): 113-121.
- Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, Chapters 1 and 2

Week 8: Concluding writing/thinking exercise: Spatial Attunement and Looking for Ghosts

This exercise seeks to connect some of the work we have done on listening to place, to critically analyzing place’s social construction, to our next section which will attend to place as archive and repertoire. It is about situating your body (as a researcher) in place and being attuned to its dynamics that are often conveyed through talk, visual media, but also landscape, architecture and weather.

As a group, we will take an industrial tour of the Carrie Furnaces. One of the three sites managed by Rivers of Steel it is understood to be a place for the ongoing “interpretation” of industrial culture and memory and postindustrial histories and futures.

As critical humanists, doing work in the academy or outside of it, our work is about interpretation as well. We try to tell stories to create awareness of issues that might be occluded or forgotten, detect patterns that reveal deeper investments in value and structural exclusions that accrue from some valuation frameworks.

The tour is a particular genre of public interpretive work. It is a mix of education and entertainment and involves affective experiences of comfort and discomfort. As Phaedra Pezzulo argues, tourism can be transformative and political.

There are two parts to the exercise:

- 1) Attunement and Analysis of Story Telling
- 2) Proposing an additional tour module that attends to ghosts or absences

You will need:

- 1) Camera or phone with camera abilities
- 2) Notebook or digital note taking device
- 3) Comfortable walking shoes and a good coat depending on weather

Part 1: This will be completed during the first week of our unit

- a) Preparation: During the tour I’d like you to pay attention to the following: what kind of information are you being told? What stories are emphasized? Who are the primary actors? How is the space used as part of that story? How might the space you are in (thinking broadly here about climate, terrain, landscape, architecture) amplify that story? How does it raise questions? Are there traces of other voices that don’t come up in the guide’s narrative that are presenced by the space (inscriptions, erosion, growths, etc). What does it feel like to move around the space? How does it make you aware of your own body? What kind of body must one have to navigate the space?
- b) Note taking: Try to take minimal notes so that you can be present during the tour. I recommend short jottings, either in a notebook or on your phone, or short audio notes. I

also highly recommend taking lots of photos to help with remembering and to aid in the second part of the assignment.

- c) Post Tour Writing: After the tour take 30 minutes to write longer versions of your notes. These are still scaffolding that you will build out, but they should be substantive to remind you of the parts of the tour that you wish to remember.
- d) Summary and reflection: Write 500 words reflecting on the experience. What experiential elements did you find important? What components of the stories told did you find surprising? How did being in the space shape some of your thinking about Pittsburgh as an industrial city?

Part 2: This will be completed during the last week of our unit

- a) Preparation: Review your tour notes and reflection page. What did you learn about the *social construction* of space, how it is used as a political or cultural resource, and the definition of the human (largely figured as the worker, the industrialist) from the tour? Given the affordances of the site, what alternative stories might one tell?
- b) Draft a proposal for a module of a tour that attends to one “ghost” left out or who you felt was haunting the tour. For instance, this could be the figure of nature—likely the guide referenced the high levels of contamination in the soil as an effect of industry. Your proposed module might start or end at the Iron Garden and raise questions about green-city initiatives in post-industrial cities and how they relate to ongoing pollution and racial health disparities in neighboring Braddock. Another ghost might be the role of settlerism. Or migrant workers. Or women. Or queer folks. The proposal can be schematic, and should offer one *place* on the site (ideally accompanied by one of your photos) along with an outline for a potential tour *narrative* supported by some secondary or primary *research* which can come from the course or your own work. You may include questions or references to future material you would want to gather to more fully develop the tour (this will be relevant for the next two units of the course). *Write in a style that does not assume everyone knows all the concepts you do—show, don’t tell.* 500 words.

We will use class time week 8 to share your modules and discuss the writing/tour development process and potential future steps.

Unit 3: Place as archive and repertoire

So far, we have largely focused on methods of place analysis and theories of place construction, which both connect to issues of memory. This section addresses how place is remembered and valued, and so we are thinking about issues of archive, repertoire, and social inequality in how spaces are remembered, seen as important, and preserved or transformed. Some of the issues we will address include vernacular landscape, the more-than-textual framework for memory (repertoire), how landscapes are coded and primed for development and who is left out (gentrification and root shock), or constructed as spaces of nostalgia or loss even as they might be verdant places for social life (suburbia and the rural), and how histories of migration (forced or otherwise) connect through home making practices through visual culture. We will complement this theoretical work with visits and examples from local archives.

Week 9: Vernacular and Monumental Landscape as Archive and Repertoire

- Hayden, Dolores. *The power of place: Urban landscapes as public history*. The MIT press, 1997. "Introduction"
- Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. [Introduction and Chapter 4]
- Taylor, Diana. *The archive and the repertoire*. Duke University Press, 2003. [Selection]
- Case Study: Riverlife Master Plan <https://riverlifepgh.org/resources/>

Week 10: Memorializing Mobility, Migration, and Visualizing Home

- *Visit to Maxo Vanka Murals in Millvale/University Special Collections*
- Margaret LaWare, "Encountering visions of Aztlán: Arguments for ethnic pride, community activism and cultural revitalization in Chicano murals." *Argumentation and Advocacy* (1998) 34, no. 3
- McAlister, Joan Faber. "Collecting the Gaze: Memory, Agency, and Kinship in the Women's Jail Museum, Johannesburg." *Women's Studies in Communication* 36, no. 1 (2013): 1-27.

Week 11: Gentrification/Urban renewal

- *Visit to Teenie Harris archives at CMOA meeting with archivist Dominique Luster/Possible visit from Dr. Amanda Boston*
- Anissa Janine Wardi, "August Wilson's Bioregional Perspective," *Callaloo*, Volume 39, Number 3, Summer 2016, pp. 680-694.
- Laura Grantmyre, "Conflicting visions of renewal in Pittsburgh's Hill District," <http://scalar.usc.edu/anvc/urban-sights-visual-culture-and-urban-history/conflicting-visions-of-renewal-in-pittsburghs-hill-district-1950-1968-by-laura-grantmyre>
- Smith, Neil. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2008. (3rd edition) [Selection]
- Zukin, Sharon. *Naked city: The death and life of authentic urban places*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Introduction and Chapter 1.
- Example: Njaimie Njie's *Homecoming: Hill District USA*

Optional:

Makagon, Daniel. "Bring on the shock troops: Artists and gentrification in the popular press." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 1 (2010): 26-52.

Johnson, Nathan R. and Meredith A., "Time and the Making of Space in Urban Development," *RSQ*, 2021.

Week 12: Non-urban spaces and the interplay of race, gender, sexuality, and rhetorics of generation

- *Potential visit from Dr. E. Cram, University of Iowa*

- McAlister, Joan Faber. "Unsafe Houses: The Narrative Inversion of Suburban Morality in Popular Film." *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 4: 11(2008): 1-25.
- Chávez, Karma R. "Remapping Latinidad: A performance cartography of Latina/o identity in rural Nebraska." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2009): 165-182.
- E. Cram, *Violent Inheritance: Sexuality, Land, and the Making of the North American West*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022 [selection]
- Film: "The Truman Show" [available on some streaming services]

Week 13: Activating Archival Stories: Pick an image or object or text from one of the online (or physical) archives or sites we have visited or discussed this semester (Rivers of Steel, University of Pittsburgh Special Collections, Teenie Harris Archives, Maxo Vanka Murals) and pair it with a reading that raises a question about the *stakes* or *importance* that the object has to *publics* in Pittsburgh.

You will write a 500-700 word piece *in the style of a blog post* reflecting on the object (providing rich description); context (where did it come from? What kinds of dialogues and conflicts is or was it imbued in); and a reflection on its role in embodying, complicating, or refuting particular narratives about place.

Imagine you are writing for a blog attached to the organization that cares for the object, e.g. the City of Asylum blog if you are writing about one of the buildings/murals. For instance, a document from the Civil Affairs Training School hosted at the University of Pittsburgh during WWII might connect to larger context about the important role that immigration has played in shaping the city and contributing to narratives about ethnic enclaves—a syllabus from this institute exhibits what Pratt might call “contact zones”—this connects to contemporary debates in the city about historic preservation and issues of ethnic memory.

As you put together your archival story pay keen attention to *audience*. Consider you are writing for and with. Not just colleagues in this course or at Pitt but neighbors who are interested in issues of Pittsburgh history and identity but who might not be as concerned about the “root shock” concept alone—you have to situate it within larger public discourses that might be more emic, for instance, debates (frustrating as they might be) on Nextdoor about “old versus new Pittsburgh.”

Week 14. Workshop potential final projects

Week 15. Present final projects